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**Chapter 1 by Magdalene**

I'm competitor number 23 out of thirty. Thirty women are fighting for the spot of the king's personal bodyguard. Why? Well, one, because the bodyguard needs to be as agile, smart, strategic, and powerful as she can to protect the king and, two, because it is almost an unspoken tradition that the king falls in love and marries the bodyguard. And since the king is young, specifically twenty, I'm part of the young women chosen from the thirty military school around our country.

One problem, though:

I don't want to fight or be a bodyguard (a.k.a. marrying the king. I mean, who is ready for taking that kind of responsibility of protecting the king and being his loved one? You have to make sure you're doing all your moves and blows right, constantly making sure you look good. Seriously). But if I don't fight for the spot, I'll be killed. Another problem: I don't wanna die.

**Chapter 2 by Soulfire**

They put us all into a room and began to assign our matches. For now, these women were friendly, even amicable. They would chatter amongst each other and perhaps even make a friend or two.

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"Do you have any idea if they're going to let us use weapons?" One woman questioned aloud, addressing her words to no particular person.

"When do we get to see the king?" Another asked.

I stayed silent. To speak would let the others know my thoughts, my plans, and in something like this silence was golden. You didn't want anyone inside your head that you could keep out with zipped lips.

"Would the contestants please approach the front of the room? We have an announcement to make."

### Chapter 3 by Rn D



"The competition is canceled. I repeat: the competition is canceled. The king has found a bodyguard. She has already saved him several times. The king's new bodyguard is Alana."

Alana?!? Oh, no! Alana was my worst enemy. Sure, I hadn't wanted the spot, but I'd rather get it than Alana. My heart started pounding in my chest. Was there a way to get her kicked out and possibly get me the spot?

### Chapter 4 by [BLDE\_79] LeMaironi- merry chrysler



"False alarm." He laughed, as if anyone else thought that was funny.

"For the first match, we will be pitting Alana and Gerilyn. The second match, Hitsoka and Hatsoki. Third match..."

He ran through the list as some men drew the bracket on the giant canvas behind him. My first bracket match will be against Surema. She was a tall, blonde girl who always carried her titanium khopesh around. She said it came from a land called "Egypt," we all thought she was swindled. There was no such place as "Egypt." Her other weapon was an obsidian spatha. I'll have to fight her with my halberd and cleaning knife, both steel.

I don't know if I'm going to enjoy this.

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Chapter 5 by Apple Feigh

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"Surema and Helena, please approach the front of the room." The announcer's loud voice woke me from my daydreaming.

We both made our way to the middle of the circle of women. I held my halberd in my right hand and kept my knife in its leather sheath; I hopefully would not be as desperate as to use it. Surema, on the other hand, had both of her weapons unsheathed. She held her spatha in her right hand and her khopesh in her left. She looked somewhat afraid, even though weapon-wise, she clearly had the advantage.

We both bowed to each other respectfully, and I couldn't help but notice her left shoe; it was bloody.

Surema used my distraction as an opportunity and slashed her spatha at my face. I dodged it. I had to stay aware now; death was not something I wanted to experience.

I swung my halberd at her, but she deflected it with her khopesh. I stepped a few feet back, and she charged me with both of her weapons in front of her. I side-stepped at the last second and slashed her back plate thanks to my halberd. She stumbled forward but caught herself and turned around, swinging her spatha. It cut my right cheek, and I felt the blood as it trickled down the side of my face.

The match went on for at least ten minutes. She started getting tired; I could sense that. Her moves were less spontaneous, and she swung with less precision.

An opportunity came.

I intercepted one of her swings with my halberd and she fell back, onto the hard marble floor. I was on top of her before she knew it, pointing my halberd at her face.

"Helena is victorious" the announcer declared. Clapping erupted from the crowd, and I helped Surema up. She nodded appreciatively, then mixed back into the crowd.

I had made it past the first and last round.

## Chapter 6 by Gabriel Duke



As I made my way down the steps, the cut on my cheek seared with pain. Even though I had made it, there was no smile on my face. I had to watch Georgina and Alana (my worst enemy) fight. Alana, sadly, had won.

Hours later...

"We have some bad news," said the organiser. "Everyone apart from Alana, Hatsuki, Helena,

Georgina and Penelope have broken the rules."

"What is this nonsense?"

"Scum!"

"You're making that up!"

"How though?" Dominique asked.

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"Er.... they've.... er.... been wearing socks. You're not allowed to!"

"That's stupid!"

"Boo! Boo!" moaned the disqualified women.

"SILENCE!" he snapped, "We are now in the semi finals. First, will be Penelope versus Helena." I was two rounds away from the final. This...was it.

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